The Rev. Matthew Lewis: A short homily on forgiveness

I, too, am from an island. Because I was born off the coast of Washington State on a small Naval base on Whitby Island, I found that when I arrived here with my wife Katie for the first time over two years as the priest-in-residence it felt so wildly familiar.. and right.. and good.

How could I have known that very soon after I was going to experience the most difficult time of my life, spiral into the deepest darkness, and that everything I thought I was supposed to do —and who I thought I was— was about to change.

This is a small part of my individual faith journey. This is a two-part story — about forgiveness.

PART ONE: the outer eye

Have you ever felt despair or shame gnaw at the foundation of your identity with a story woven from the past leading you to choose to believe a simple yet devastating series of lies about yourself?

Errors I made in my past wasted no time in converting themselves into parasites upon the god-given identity. And though the price was paid, it was as if the fear had not gotten the memo; and it had come to live within me, convinced that I needed its protection.

It was as if my body had been wired with a new alarm system and there were different little parts in me with roles to play. The alarm bells are ringing for me to exit the building, but what do you do when the building is your body? After time, I came to meet these parts of myself, and name them, and know them.

The bellringer was very helpful because he would set off the alarm bells in my body whenever there was something to fear.

The herald always reminded me of my shameful state in order to protect me.

The forecaster was very good at predicting any opportunity for me to panic so that I could get a head start on anxiety.

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And the archiver dutifullly maintained the vaults of all my wrongs. It was as if I had undergone an eye transplant, and had exchanged my eyes for the eyes of fearful surveillance. The fear that presides over not feeling at peace with the society of your own self cannot be beared for long— I despaired. I didn't *want* to die, I sobbed in front of my friends when I finally told them the truth. I said: it's just that ive felt a small dip in the will to live. I could not bear it any longer.

PART TWO: the inner eye

Standing on the shore within the break-line of the waves and ever so slowly, with each receding wave, I feel the sand pull away from beneath my heels. (Do you know the feeling?) Little by little the sands were shifting and the tides were pulling at the foundations of my most basic beliefs. And like the eyes of a newborn child opening for the first time, I felt the eyes of the Spirit look through me upon my inner parts - bellringer and all— with the most gentle loving gaze— And as Frances preached forgiveness to the wild birds of Assisi so did The Healer sing the song of forgiveness to the sundered parts of my own fear-ridden self.

And with a heart wide open like Kalihiwai Bay, I saw through the inward eye: my self made whole. And as I whispered a word of thanks to my parts. Lo!— The bellringer now rings the bell of freedom! The herald now tells the tale of grace! The forecaster spies the noble spirit instead of shame. And the archives are rich with the stories of God's good deeds. And as I stood there amid the sands and tides— I knew as an imperturbable fact that even if I were to sink down beneath the sand down below the crust of the earth where the Hawaiian island chain was born. Or even if the depths erupted forth from the ocean floor and bore me up on a fiery plume from the mantel of the earth upward and upward over millions of years until I breach the waters like Waialeale— I would still know that, whether in the depths of the oceanbottom or from the height of the mountains' peak— That the Spirit has looked through my own eyes upon all my life and judged all things be blessed. As you stand upon the shore. may you hear Christ's call to venture out into the bay of your oneness with God's own heart.. and may you be held there a while.. and bask there.. in the time between the tides of our One United Self.